New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1951

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NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK MIRROR

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"Flahooley"

Daily Mirror

May 15, 1951

'Flahooley' Is Great But Politically Fulla Hooey

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Cheryl Crawford brought a highly original musical comedy called "Flahooley" to the Broadhurst Theatre last evening. The work of E. Y. Harburg, Fred Saidy and Sammy Fain, it utilizes puppets as well as people. It could easily have been just the type of show for the entire family. But, unfortunately, the librettists have sacrificed laughs to the soap-box.

The Harburg-Saidy book has to do with a young inventor who creates a laughing doll, named "Flahooley," and thereby hopes to earn enough money to marry that pretty little girl down the hall in the toy factory. Instead, he upsets our production system and causes a financial catastrophe. But a perplexed little genie, right out of an Arabian lamp, finally puts things to rights for the lovers.

The materials are there for a delightful, captivating fantasy, but, alas, they have been subordinated to lengthy passages critical of our politics, economics and ethics. These musical comedy essays are not only dull, but obscure. To give you an idea of how boring they are, we didn't get a solid chuckle from even such a vastly amusing fellow as Ernest Truex, who is saddled with the role of a toy tycoon baffled by the law of supply and demand and profits.

One first-nighter was overheard to say: "With the United States at war, this is hardly the time to condemn a production system that has given us an amazingly high standard of living and, at the same time, managed to arm us and our allies." With employment at a record peak, with this country facing its greatest crisis, we echo those sentiments.

The Bil and Cora Baird marionettes are quite wonderful when left to their own devices, and not forced to spout dubious philosophy. One of the most interesting personalities to reach Broadway since the debut of Carmen Miranda is Yma Sumac, supposed to be a lineal descendant of Inca royalty. Cast as an Arabian Princess, she displays arresting showmanship and a fascinating trick voice that encompasses four octaves.

Others who make the most of their opportunities are Jerome Courtland, Irwin Corey, Barbara Cook, Edith Atwater, Fay DeWitt, Marilyn Ross, Lulu Bates and Elizabeth Logue.

Sammy Fain has composed a pleasant, spirited score, equipped with catchy lyrics by Harburg. Arranged by Ted Royal, it is played to the hilt by a pit orchestra under the dynamic direction of Maurice Levine. Levine won a bigger hand that most of the players on stage when he conducted the overture. He not only conducted, but sang the lyrics as well. He was ably abetted by a gifted and enthusiastic percussion artist. They put on quite a show.

The settings by Howard Bay and costumes by David Ffolkes are festive. Helen Tamiris has provided gay ensembles.

"Flahooley" could have been a beguiling musical, a gala fiesta for young and old, had producer Crawford excised the hooey from the script. Perhaps she will yet get around to an editing job, and turn it into a joyous and palatable event.

"FLAHOOLEY"

Musical comedy written and directed by E. Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy; music by Sammy Fain; lyrics by Mr. Harburg; settings by Howard Bay; costumes by David Ffolkes; dances by Helen Tamiris; presented by Cheryl Crawford in association with Messrs. Harburg and Saidy at the Broadhurst Theatre, May 14, 1951. The cast:

A March of Time Voice.... Stanley Carlson
Clyde.... Bil Baird
Mirabelle.... Cora Baird
Sandy.... Barbara Cook
Sylvester.... Jerome Courtland
Griselda.... Fay DeWitt
K. T. Pettigrew.... Edith Atwater
B. G. Bigelow.... Ernest Truex
Miss Buckley.... Marilyn Ross
Clayfoot Trowbridge.... Rowan Tudor
Fowzi.... Nehemiah Persoff
El-Akbar.... Louis Nye
Najia.... Yma Sumac
Abou Ben Atom.... Irwin Corey
Elsa Bullinger.... Lulu Bates
Dr. Smith.... Franklin T. Syme
Flahooley.... Elizabeth Logue

DAILY NEWS

May 15, 1951

'Flahooley' a Gay, Whimsical and Tuneful Musical With a Message

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Flahooley," which arrived at the Broadhurst last evening, is a tuneful, extraordinarily beautiful and delightfully imaginative musical. It also may be the most elaborately coated propaganda pill ever to be put on a stage, for along with the fabulous Bil and Cora Baird puppets, the magnificent Howard Bay sets and David Ffolkes costumes, the weird vocal nipups of Yma Sumac and the gay songs by Sammy Fain and E. Y. Harburg there is delivered a message. The message is an earnest plea for political liberalism, for an end to "witch hunts" and for an end to deliberate destruction of goods.

"Flahooley" is at its best when it is being whimsical and nonsensical and is easily the most original musical of the season. Ernest Truex, the toy king—or toycoon, as he is called in a song—is desperate for a Christmas novelty. A young employe, Jerome Courtland, turns up a winner by inventing a Flahooley—a doll which neither wets itself nor cries, but laughs.

Repairing an Old Lamp.

So far, wonderful. The opening curtain, a glowing silhouette of an enormous factory, is stunning, and soon afterward one is plunged into a fantastic and friendly puppet world offering on a large and colorful scale the kind of enchantment Kukla and Ollie purvey on TV.

It's fine, too, when an Arabian delegation headed by Princess Sumac arrives to get Mr. Truex to fix their lamp. To Ernie it looks like an outsize table model cigaret lighter, but to the Arabs it is the real thing—Aladdin's own lamp. And it won't work any more. They rub it and rub it but the genie won't come out. The young genius of the Flahooley fixes the lamp and out pops the genie, Irwin Corey, eager for work.

From here on, the fun is not altogether successfully mixed with thinking. The genie, in response to a wish, starts making Flahooleys for every child in the world and soon there is an economy of superabundance which forces the factory and a whole town to shut down. The young inventor is damned, Flahooleys are burned and broken in public uprisings and a great hunt is organized to capture the genie and deport him from the country.

Fresh, Happy Songs.

Mr. Fain's score and Mr. Harburg's lyrics are fresh and happy. Miss Sumac reveals herself as an odd personality with what I'd call a four-story yodel with a Bing Crosby base—or bass. Mr. Truex is most engaging as the diminutive toy king, and one scene in which he calls off a directors' meeting in order to play with some electric trains has a really magical touch.

Young Mr. Courtland, from the movies, has a nice voice and an engaging personality, and the girl he is in love with is sweetly played by Barbara Cook. As the genie, Mr. Corey looks astonishingly as though he really had come out of a lamp, and he maintains his bounce even when he is struggling to understand the law of supply and demand.

Fred Saidy is co-author with Mr. Harburg of the book. These two and Cheryl Crawford have produced "Flahooley," and their greatest inspiration has been to engage Mr. Bay to design the sets and the Bairds to bring their puppets. Those puppets do anything. One of them can smoke a cigaret and inflate a balloon. This kind of inflation is entertaining.

New York Post

May 15, 1951

By Vernon Rice

Lost, a Reviewer in 'Flahooley's' Plot

Lost anything lately? If the item is still missing, you might take a look at the E. Y. Harburg-Fred Saidy musical, "Flahooley," which Cheryl Crawford, in association with the two gentlemen, brought to the Broadhurst last night. No doubt, it's all wrapped up in that plot. Everything else is, "Flahooley" has satire, fantasy, social comment, the State Dept., Arabians, a magic lamp, a genie, marionettes, the spirit of Christmas, a boy-girl love story, Sammy Fain's music, a doll which laughs instead of cries, Howard Bay settings, David Ffolkes costumes, and Ernest Truex.

It also has Yma Sumac (how did she get here?), Helen Tamiris dances, valiant Edith Atwater and a story so complicated that it makes a Republican's interpretation of the Truman-MacArthur difficulty seem simple.

Don't expect me to explain it to you. I got lost early in the first act, soon after Miss Sumac, who is Peruvian, tried to explain to Mr. Truex, who couldn't be more American, the plot in a song, which I guessed to be Arabian.

The Pride of Peru

It's hard to tell about Miss Sumac, whose first name is Yma. She is truly remarkable. The program claims she can sing in four octaves. My bet is that the press department boys underestimated those octaves. I'd give her at least seven. She sounds, at times, like a lady frog who swallowed a siren. She's the pride of old Peru, and that's plenty good enough for me.

Now, let's see. Where were we? Oh, yes. Miss Sumac is singing to Mr. Truex, the most misused comedian of our time. Someday somebody is going to write a part worthy of Mr. Truex's talents, and that will make both of us happy.

"Flahooley" gets its title from a name of a doll, invented in Mr. Truex's factory, for his Christmas sales. Its inventor, the juvenile lead, christens it Flahooley, because Flahooley can't be spelled backwards. Cute, huh?

Now, this young inventor wants to marry a girl worker in the same factory, but, I believe, Mr. Truex stands in their way. A genie out of a lamp provided by the Arabians, starts out to help them, but then he becomes Santa Claus on a street corner.

At that point, my mind, wearied by a hard day's work at the office, got lost, and I took to trying to figure out my numerous notes written in the program.

No 'Finian's Rainbow'

They, having been written in the dark, became as entangled as the story line. Sorry, folks, but you'll just have to sit this one out.

It seems to me that the Messrs. Harburg and Saidy became so enamored with their "Finian's Rainbow," for which Sammy Fain did not write the music, but Burton Lane did, that the writers decided if they tripled the ingredients for "Flahooley," the show would be three times as successful. Well, it didn't work out that way.

A Cheryl Crawford production couldn't be completely without merit. In this show there are Bil Baird Marionettes, and though they had very little to do with the plot (yet, maybe they did), they were at all times enchanting. Move over Kukla, Fran and Ollie. Make room for your friends.

Then Fain wrote some serviceable songs in "Here's to Your Illusions," "Who Says There Ain't No Santa Claus?" "The World Is Your Balloon" and "Jump, Little Chilliun."

As for Jerome Courtland, Edith Atwater, Irwin Corey, Barbara Cook and others in the cast, they just got bogged down in the book and Howard Bay's heavy scenery.

Miss Crawford and her associates might profit by television, and let the marionettes take over for the rest of the show's run.

Journal American

May 15, 1951

A Musical That Has Nearly Everything

By ROBERT GARLAND

No matter how you spell it, "Flahooley" spells imagination. Here at the Broadhurst is a new musical produced by Cheryl Crawford. With book by E. Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy, lyrics by Mr. Harburg and music by Sammy Fain, it has nearly everything. Including dances by Helen Tamiris, costumes by David Ffolkes and scenery by Howard Bay.

With a touch of "Babes in Toyland," a smattering of the "Wizard of Oz" and a suggestion of "Finian's Rainbow," it is all of these and none. It is as old as Aladdin's lamp and as young as the atom bomb, both of which are in it. And it laughs, even at the villainous saltpetre. So do we ageless children. Almost everyone.

We haven't had a "Flahooley" since I don't know when. Maybe never! It is sweet and simple. It is wry and complex. It is a child's show, but it is never childish. It is a grownup's show, but it is never grown up. It even has a message, but I don't know what it is. It is also magic, bringing Ernest Truex back to fun.

But Mr. Truex is not the only happy member of the cast. There are Jerome Courtland and Barbara Cook, Irwin Corey and Edith Atwater, the Bil Baird Marionettes, who are practically human, and Yma Sumac, who is not. Miss Sumac, who comes from Peru, can do things with her voice. She is an eyeful, too. She and the puppets.

• • •

Several Stories

There is a story at the Broadhurst. There are several. One has to do with the Puppet Laboratory of B. G. Bigelow, Incorporated. And B. G. Bigelow, himself. Another has to do with Najla and a younger and an older Arab. Still another has to do with Abou Ben Atom, who is a genie, and Sandy and Sylvester, who are not. And still another—

How these stories get together, you will not know from me. But they do! They get together in Capsulanti, which is in the U. S. A. There, in Mr. Bigelow's toy factory, the City Hall Square and the Hospital Room where the genie is, "Flahooley" winds and unwinds itself until springtime arrives and the happy ending is at hand.

And it is amazing how the stories blend yet keep apart. B. G. Bigelow and his toy factory are business-like and unbelievable. Najla and her accompanying Arabs are unbusiness-like and believable. And Abou Ben Atom is out of this world, like Aladdin's lamp and the atom bomb. Yet, at the Broadhurst, they all seem to belong.

They are vastly sustained by Sammy Fain's music. This is music out of Mr. Fain's top drawer, from Najla's specially written songs to such good and jukebox numbers as "The World Is Your Balloon" and "Who Says There Ain't No Santa Claus?" Staged effectively by Miss Tamiris, the cast and chorus make the most of them.

• • •

Make Debuts

Taking the cast in the order of its appearance, Barbara Cook and Jerome Courtland are the lovers. One from the South, the other from the West, they are making their Broadway debuts. Effectively. Edith Atwater is a non-musical lady who musicalizes readily. Irwin Corey comes to Abou Ben Atom via the night clubs.

Of Yma Sumac — Emperatriz Sumac Chavarri Atahualpa of the Andes Mountains of Peru— you have heard. She is descended from the last of the Inca kings. Her voice, the voice of the earthquake and the birds, rises from a very low contralto to a very high C. She is a looker, too! Her performance, according to the program, is dazzling.

As for Ernest Truex, he is himself again. As B. G. Bigelow, he has come a long, long way. His is "Wildfire," "Very Good, Eddie" and "The Third Little Show"; "Whistling in the Dark," "George Washington Slept Here" and failure after failure this curious season. Now, he comes to life again. "Flahooley" would not be as right without him.

And "Flahooley" is right enough at the Broadhurst. It is as sophisticated as it is not, dealing with Aladdin's lamp and atomic bomb at the same time, making fun of business and taking love seriously, singing, dancing and cutting up, furnishing song and dance and beauty, almost concurrently. I like it. Especially before it gets so complicated.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

May 15, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

Gags and Dolls

THE new "Flohooley" is a gaudy grab bag of limp jokes and lively music, stirred around with a couple of variety acts and a lot of energy. In it are to be found some good melodies by Sammy Fain; the voice of Yma Sumac trilling or throbbing through its incredible range, and the delightful mimicry of the Bil and Cora Baird puppets. Along with this comes a heap of nonsense about a pair of young lovers and a toy manufacturer, an assortment of puns and laborious sight gags filed under the heading of an original musical comedy book by E. Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy. "Flahooley" dances and harmonizes in a near-vacuum of wit or organization at the Broadhurst, and it is, at best, a mediocre summer extravaganza.

* * *

Fain's songs have a vivacity about them that goes well with active merriment in the production numbers staged by Helen Tamiris in a toy showroom, a city square or in procession before a backdrop. "The Springtime Cometh," sung by a mournful genie, is a pleasant air, and there are other strains befitting lovers or Christmas carolers, as the occasion demands. Miss Sumac, playing an Arabian princess and singing two songs especially written for her, is a birdlike musical phenomenon as she drops into contralto or swoops to high soprano, weaving charms with her hands as she does so. Like the other attractions, however, she is as much on her own as a circus sideshow act and is heard above the general confusion of a garrulous but meaningless ensemble.

* * *

The Harburg-Saidy libretto touches Arabian legend, American business, economics, the State Department and the atomic age with the cold hand of forced humor. It is about a toy manufacturer who cannot stop a genie from magically producing laughing Flahooley dolls until the bottom drops out of the market, and for some obscure reason it later turns into a symbol of society's problems. The line in Saidy's lyrics about "the genie with the light brown hair" is a sample of this comedy. It happens that the factory setting allows the Bairds to pull the strings on their group of wooden figures in two amusing interludes. The human involvements are far less successful, even with Ernest Truex edging in and out of the plot as a wizard of the toy trade.

* * *

Fay DeWitt and Marilyn Ross lead the singing choruses with never-failing high spirits, and Barbara Cook and Jerome Courtland are paired off in "Here's to Your Illusions" and other numbers dealing with romance. Irwin Corey is the bouncing little fellow who comes out of a lamp in a puff of flame, and Edith Atwater, Lulu Bates and Elizabeth Logue have subsidiary places in the story. Howard Bay did the sets and lighting, and David Ffolkes the costumes, for this production. As far as bulk and activity are concerned "Flahooley" is a standard Broadway musical show, but in the departments of laughter and continuity there are some large pieces missing.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

May 15, 1951

'Flahooley' Puppets Commit Larceny on Fantasy's Actors

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Musical.

Topic—Surplus dolls.

I find it—Fantastic.

Right at the start of "Flahooley" a red headed chorus does a pony ballet. The dancers are not girls. They are hippy little horses that are puppets, and you feel it will be hard to top them. It is impossible.

Every once in a while, through this fantastic tale of an overwrought toy factory, the puppets take over. They make you sorry for the cast trying to compete with them, and sometimes even sorry you are human.

For the dolls are enchanting. The show itself is not. Despite some entertaining notions, it is curiously without charm. I think that may be because the creators have such contempt for humans, and spend so much of the evening saying so.

Aladdin Comes Back.

The story sounds wonderful for a musical. The hero invents a new doll that laughs. In order to make a commercial success of the toy, a genie who has been rubbed out of an old Arabian lamp makes the dolls by magic.

They flood the world until a move is begun to wipe them out. The last "Flahooley," as the new doll is known, comes to life for the genie. By a method I did not at all understand, they made everybody happy for the finale.

This tale ought to be bright and gay. It is performed in a labored fashion, and is so short on humor that at one point last night the audience groaned in unison at a pun.

Actors Uncertain.

The narrative is splattered and incoherent in the telling. The actors last night were as tentative as if they expected the lights to fail, the sound system to go off, or the stage to cave in, any minute.

It is inadvisable to hold your breath waiting for the crack about the "genie with the dark brown hair." It comes just two hours after the show begins. Somewhere along the way Ernest Truex shouts, "Stop the world, I want to get off!" This is a remark with many ironic implications.

There are a few too brief dances that have genuine charm, particularly the first introduction of the lifesize dolls. There is also a fascinating set of costumes resembling band instruments. The show is not particularly pretty to look at, which surprised me. The tunes are often catchy.

Yma Sings Again.

Yma Sumac is a handsome woman who resembles Nita Naldi and comes from the same acting school. She is vastly publicized as having a vocal range of four octaves. She sings in all of them, a trick which has nothing whatever to do with anything else about her character, or the show. One lady in the audience remarked, "She's doing it beautifully, but what is she doing?"

Ernest Truex looks as if he was being most agreeable about being trapped in the Walt Disney studios, and is as funny as possible.

Irwin Corey is zany as the genie, until expected to act like Camille. He makes up for that with a bright little number about spring, which is danced with pleasant skill by Elizabeth Logue.

Barbara Cook and Jerome Courtland are comely enough juveniles who sing pleasantly, and Edith Atwater is brisk and capable as a factory manager. Fay DeWitt and Marilyn Ross sing heartily.

In the end it is the Bil Baird Marionettes that are the leading characters of the evening. They perform with taste, invention and irony, and their superiority to the human race is tantalizing.

The New York Times
May 15, 1951

'Flahooley,' New Musical Play by Harburg and Saidy, With a Score by Sammy Fain

By BROOKS ATKINSON

"Flahooley" is known as the musical play with a book not adapted from some other play or novel. Unfortunately, the distinction is purely technical. For the plot with which E. Y. Harburg and Fred Saidy have endowed their new production is one of the most complicated, verbose and humorless of the season; and it weighs heavily against beautiful scenery and costumes, enchanting performers and two or three gay puppet shows.

These are the same authors who wrote "Finiah's Rainbow." They still have an imaginative approach to their story. "Flahooley" includes a good genii who comes out of an Arabian lamp and performs feats of magic in a world that has lost its capacity for innocence and joy.

* * *

Not a bad idea for sorcery to music and dancing. But Mr. Harburg and Mr. Saidy have tried to mate it with a satire of big business and industry. In the course of the evening more plot crosses the stage than Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. But it seems to this column to be a colossal non sequitur. Mr. Harburg and Mr. Saidy have given themselves plot enough to hang a lovely looking show.

For "Flahooley" comes to the Broadhurst bearing all the rich gifts of a fine production. Jerome Courtland and Barbara Cook, the romantic leads, are especially winning young people; and Mr. Fain has given them some ingratiating songs to sing.

As the good genii Irwin Corey is a pleasantly humorous prince of wonder. The Bil Baird Marionettes have a genius for mockery and drollery. Among those present is Yma Sumac, who looks agreeably voluptuous in her Arabian costumes and has a voice of prodigious range. Those are the principal performers in the imaginative sequences of "Flahooley." Although Mr. Fain's music is not exactly inspired, it serves the purpose amiably enough. And although Helen Tamiris' dances are not the finest of the season, they, too, are professional.

It is the misfortune of Ernest Truex and Edith Atwater to be caught in the labyrinth of the plot. If they find their way out of it in the end, it is because they are good troupers who know how to step over an awkward transition and a heap of irrelevancies.

* * *

Something should be said in praise of the warmth and purity of Howard Bay's scene designs, and of David Ffolkes' superb costumes. Both of them are artists and know how to improvise in a fairy-story atmosphere. But Mr. Harburg and Mr. Saidy lack the gifts their theme requires. They have stifled "Flahooley" under a blanket of pedestrian story-telling.

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"Getting Married"

DAILY NEWS

May 14, 1951

Old Shaw Never Fades Away; See Anta Revival of 'Getting Married'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Marjorie and Sherman Ewing's production of Shaw's "Getting Married" at the ANTA Playhouse is quite a stylish offering of one of the old boy's glibbest comedies. In it twelve actors and actresses, eleven of whom are very good, talk about wedlock. And when I say talk I mean talk. G. B. S. doesn't give them a moment's peace for three amusing acts as he forces them to the conclusion that marriage is the best system even though it is badly planned.

Actually, it is a one-act play, for Shaw didn't put any intermissions in it and it was played as a talkathon by William Faversham, Henrietta Crosman and other stalwarts in 1916. In the present presentation Peter Frye, the director, has had the good judgment to break it up at two very convenient moments. An important character is announced but does not appear, and the rest of the company freeze in a tableau as the curtain descends. When the next act begins they unfreeze and get along with the play. I will bet just anything that they don't stand where they are during the intermission; they make straight for the water cooler and get a long drink before resuming the fray.

The standard Shaw formula is used in "Geting Married." Sex is examined, lightly, cleverly and sometimes intelligently, through the eyes and minds of the clergy, the military and the state—in this case a bishop, a retired general and an alderman who is a greengrocer on the side. The setting is the bishop's 12th Century Norman castle, very well constructed by Paul Morrison.

An Admirable Company.

Several others get into the clatter, including a divorced couple, an affianced couple, a young man in love and a woman who does not allow marriage to limit the pleasures of life. Since sex and marriage were very old institutions even in 1916, Shaw's comedy sounds just as bright and new now as it must have sounded in 1916. Old Shaw may have died, but he never fades away.

Peggy Wood is excellent as the mysterious Mrs. George, whose views of wedlock are practical. Splendid, too, is Guy Spaull as the bishop—much more human than most of G. B. S.'s clergymen. Arthur Treacher, John Merivale, John Buckmaster and Dennis Hoey are admirable comedians, and among the ladies I liked Edith Meiser's spinster for her ironic humor and Barbara Britton's divorcee for her remarkable good looks.

And so ANTA ends its first season at the Playhouse on a happy note. "Getting Married" is worth reviving and it is nicely done.

"GETTING MARRIED"

Play by George Bernard Shaw; staged by Peter Frye; settings and costumes by Paul Morrison; presented by Marjorie and Sherman Ewing for the American National Theatre and Academy at the ANTA Playhouse, May 13, 1951. The cast:

Mrs. Bridgenorth.....Margaret Bannerman
Collins.....Bramwell Fletcher
Maid.....Frances Greet
Maid.....Michaela Myers
Gen. Bridgenorth..Dennis Hoey
Lesbia Grantham..Edith Meiser
Reginald Bridgenorth....Arthur Treacher
Leo.....Barbara Britton
Alfred Bridgenorth..Guy Spaull
St. John Hotchkiss.....John Buckmaster
Cecil Sykes.....John Merivale
Edith.....Dora Sayers
Soames.....Frederic Warriner
The Beadle.....Ronald Telfer
Mrs. George.....Peggy Wood

New York Post

May 14, 1951

By Vernon Rice

G. B. Shaw Never Fails for Words

There's a lot to be said concerning marriage, and George Bernard Shaw didn't overlook a point on the subject in his talk-fest, "Getting Married," which opened last night at the ANTA Playhouse as the last production of its 10-play series.

Marriage was not one of the late playwright's favorite institutions, not even as far back as 1908, when he wrote the comedy, which he intended as a long one-act play, but which ANTA and the satire's producers, Marjorie and Sherman Ewing, wisely broke up into three parts. Without the two intermissions, last evening's audience probably would have gagged on Shaw's overabundance of words. "Getting Married" makes the Shaw of his later works seem like the shy and quiet type.

If he had only made his point and then gone on about some other business of the day, the talk might have been more tolerable. Or if, after having told us what was wrong with wedded bliss in England, he would have given a comparison of holy wedlock in Indo-China, and, say, the Fiji Islands, at least there would have been some variety thrown into the one-sided debate.

Shaw didn't move out of the British Isles, however, or even out of the kitchen of the 12th century Norman castle, where he placed his soap box, and words boiled over like unwatched rice on a cook-stove.

Many Have Their Say

"Getting Married" has a lot of people talking about the same thing. They include the couple involved, the bride-to-be's mother, her maiden aunt, the maiden aunt's suitor, a general in uniform; the bride's father, a bishop; the bishop's assistant, the greengrocer, who helps out at weddings; his sister-in-law, the mayoress; the groom's best man, and numerous and sundry others, who never leave the kitchen to go to the wedding they came to attend, because they are so busy airing their views. Religion is touched upon, but it's the principal subject which gets chewed to bits.

All angles are gone into in this over-long essay put upon a stage, but it all comes out like Shaw.

Faced with the problem of getting variety out of a stage full of characters, who, like the last guests at a party, won't shut up and go home, the best director Peter Frye could do was to become a football coach and maneuver his people on signals.

At least he succeeded in making the leading man of previous days, Bramwell Fletcher, a creditable character actor, with the role of Collins, the green-grocer, and Arthur Treacher drops most of his tricks made familiar and famous by his many films.

Blows the Play Good

Peggy Wood is no ill-wind when she blows in with her delayed entrance playing Mrs. George, the mayoress. She's strong and she's gusty and she's vital and fresh.

Frederic Warriner who, to me, stole the recent revival of "The Taming of the Shrew" at City Center from the whole company with his one appearance in the small role of the tailor, has a chance few actors have, outside of repertory, of showing his wide range and versatility as an actor. As Soames, the Bishop's assistant, Warriner is still a comedy character but had I not seen his name on the program I would not have known the same man played the two parts.

Edith Meiser is properly and independently prissy as the maiden aunt. John Merivale and John Buckmaster offer varying humorous performances playing the groom and the best man respectively, and Margaret Bannerman and Guy Spaull do what they can with the roles of the bride's parents.

A more than adequate set was designed by Paul Morrison who also collected and matched the costumes.

"Getting Married" again proves Shaw to have been a prophet before his time, but how that man could talk!

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

May 14, 1951

Shavian Play Kids Marriage Laws

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Comedy.

Topic—Marriage laws.

I find it—2/3 Funny.

ANTA has come up with a lesser known comedy of Bernard Shaw to close its subscription season. "Getting Married" is in the Shavian groove, in that it has a good deal to recommend it by way of wit and entertainment.

It also has some faults which make it add up to an oddly distorted evening. Spinning complications and airy cynicisms, Shaw is delightful as always. When he begins to clarify, and end his story, the play grows obscure and unattractive.

As is so frequently true of his work, the time element in this comedy of Shaw's is remarkably nonexistent. He is blasting the legal restrictions which have made a drudgery of marriage and a farce of divorce.

Still Hit Target.

Most of his comments on the subject are perfectly applicable to our own laws right now. He has a dozen characters represent as many attitudes about marriage —past, present and future. In discontent they set about drafting a legal contract of partnership to take the place of marriage.

All of this is enormous fun, and moves along with the sort of salty gaiety one expects from Shaw. Then he introduces a new character, the Mayoress, who has been associated in various capacities with several of the principal characters. In a disconcerting manner she tries to be a devil, a saint or just a woman, to each man in turn.

I frankly did not understand what she was accomplishing, or even what she was talking about much of the time. At any rate, everyone seemed to end up contentedly, as in a musical comedy.

Stunning Trance.

It is almost a pity that the play could not end at the second intermission, with everything in a cheery snarl.

The play is directed quite magnificently by Peter Frye. He keeps it in motion when it is at its wordiest, and this without its becoming aggressively athletic. It is performed with style and invention and impertinence.

The cast at large is fine. Let us say immediately that its most prominent member, Miss Peggy Wood, has one of the most confusing and ungrateful assignments imaginable, as the Mayoress who turns up in the last act. Her trance was a stunning abstraction.

Saucy Snob.

John Buckmaster is splendid as a saucy snob who wants to marry a divorcee but loves the mystic late arrival. So are Arthur Treacher as the castoff husband, Dennis Hoey as a military suitor, and Guy Spaull as a worldly bishop.

Bramwell Fletcher does one of his best jobs as a greengrocer. John Merivale is a distraught and unwilling groom, and Frederic Warriner is striking as a pompous sexton.

Barbara Britton has charm as a marrying young lady, and Dora Sayers is attractive and assertive as a cautious bride. Edith Meiser is elegant as a spinster by choice, and Margaret Bannerman is a charming if confused mother.

There is a grand rich setting for the play, a 12th century castle, designed by Paul Morrison.

Journal American

May 14, 1951

Revival of a Revival Is Talky But Funny

By ROBERT GARLAND

Yesterday, in the wake of two performances of Blanche Yurka's one-woman show and two weeks of Edmund Wilson's three-act "The Little Blue Light," ANTA turned to Stark Young in the afternoon and Bernard Shaw at night. Mr. Young's was a one-man show and dealt with Eleonora Duse. Mr. Shaw's was "Getting Married," a revival of a revival.

Although I didn't get to see her in her prime, Eleonora Duse is the one great actress I have seen. Well, then, she and Laurette Taylor. Stark Young, who knows greatness when he talks about it, talked about the Italian great one. All too briefly! But he went so far as to pronounce her family name correctly, not as the elegant do.

You knew Eleonora Duse, you understood her, after Mr. Young got through with her. He put her in her rightful place. And Gabriele D'Annunzio as well. If you listened between the lines, you heard—or thought you heard—things you have long conjectured. They, for the most part, were about the signora, although the signore was no ordinary man . . .

Stark Young isn't an easy-going public talker. He is ill-at-ease, intelligent, deeply in the know. And what gifts of humor and humanity!

• • •

All-American

When, in passing, I pointed out that, as reproduced by ANTA, Bernard Shaw's "Getting Married" was a revival of a revival, I meant just what I said. For the American National Theatre and Academy—I think that's what ANTA means—staged this "comedy without intermissions" at the Ann Arbor play festival last Summer. June, I believe.

Being All-American, you know, it was directed by Sir Cedric Hardwicke, who acted in it, too. He was surrounded by Mady Christians, Dennis King, Judith Evelyn, Arthur Treacher, Ralph Forbes, John Buckmaster, Colin Keith-Johnston, Margaret Bannerman and John Merivale. Booked for Broadway in October, it died in California or beyond.

Now, nearly a year later, it's here with six of the original ANTA revivalists intact. The others, the new recruits, take in Peggy Wood, Edith Meiser, Bramwell Fletcher and Dennis Hoey. Mr. Hoey is so very English that I doubt if he can understand himself. The others are understandable, small doubt, and repeat some witty Shavian lines.

But it's a relief when Peggy Wood comes on late as Mrs. George and lets the rest go hang. It's also red, white, blue and comforting.

• • •

Contrary to run-of-Broadway common knowledge, "Getting Married" was not first produced in America by the New York Theatre Guild. I saw it 15 years before with Henrietta Crossman as Mrs. George. William Faversham was the Bishop of Chelsea. And the producer, I think the theatre was the Booth. The Theatre Guild revival was in 1931.

And in the same show house it was in last night, Helen Westley, Margaret Wycherly, Henry Travers, Ernest Cossart, Dorothy Gish, Hugh Buckler, Reginald Mason, Hugh Sinclair, Romney Brent, Peg Entwhistle and Ralph Roeder were acting Shavians then. Philip Moeller staged it. But it ran for less than half-a-hundred performances.

Now, as I've said, Peggy Wood acts knowingly with the late-arriving Mrs. George who is merely Bernard Shaw slightly disguised in Paul Morrison's costume. Mr. Morrison also designed the palace of The Bishop of Chelsea where, in 1908, the Shavian talkfest takes place. While long-winded and in need of cutting, it is still amusing.

In its present revival of a revival, which also was a revival, "Getting Married" must surely be what the ANTA "play series" is for.

The New York Times

May 14, 1951

'GETTING MARRIED' REVIVED BY ANTA

Shaw Satire Has Peggy Wood, Edith Meiser, Treacher and Buckmaster in Cast

Before last night, there had not been a professional production of Bernard Shaw's comedy, "Getting Married," on a New York stage since 1931. Earlier, it had been offered here commercially in 1916. It would seem, then, that the time was right for another look at Shaw's satire on the state of matrimony. The American National Theatre and Academy scheduled the play as the final offering in its 1950-51 series of ten productions at the Anta Playhouse.

Even as a Shavian novelty, however, "Getting Married" is not an impressive contribution to the modern stage. Perhaps the years that have elapsed since it was written have made a difference. The barbs that Shaw projected at the state of wedlock, the military and the clergy undoubtedly were more daring and more shocking at the turn of the century than they are today.

But, as presented last evening, "Getting Married" has shortcomings that are independent of the passage of years. Its first two acts contain some mildly amusing observations on human frailty. But in the final act, it becomes verbose and obscure. Shaw undoubtedly knew what he was writing; he may have derived some private amusement from the ideas he was expounding. To this observer they were, to a great extent, vague and tedious.

It was the misfortune of Peggy Wood not to have made her entrance until the final act began. Miss Wood, as a clairvoyant lady, introduced with the apparent purpose of resolving a series of minor sociological crises that had developed earlier in the play, was really up against it. It is unlikely that even television has presented her with such insuperable difficulties. Her role combined elements of Diamond Lil, Trilby and Katherine, the Shrew. Miss Wood carried on courageously.

The cream of Shaw's jest in "Getting Married" went to John Buckmaster, portraying a self-confessed advocate of snobbery, and to Edith Meiser, who played Lesbia, a spinster who preferred to remain one. Both of them gave performances of high quality.

Arthur Treacher, as a husband willing to accept estrangement; Bramwell Fletcher, a philosophical green grocer - alderman; Guy Spaull, a somewhat mellow prelate, and Barbara Britton, a lady of grace and some venom, also gave spirited portrayals.

Paul Morrison's setting, a twelfth-century Norman castle interior, was a handsome contribution to the production. J.P.S.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

May 14, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

ANTA's Finale

The closing program in this season's ANTA Play Series is a revival of Shaw's "Getting Married," in which the late playwright's script is forced to carry too much of the load. The company presenting this satire on matrimony gives a barely adequate reading in which only the more obvious jokes and broader strokes of character survive. Except for a few roles and scenes, this leisurely discussion of marriage in a British upper class family lacks the flair to support the words with anything like a clever presentation. Left to its own devices, "Getting Married" becomes a tedious succession of formal epigrams and witticisms on a subject that is, on the whole, theatrically stale.

* * *

Shaw's play concerns the gathering of the Bridgenorth family for the wedding of a niece, and the ceremony is neglected while they gossip among themselves and with their intimates in a nook of the Norman castle which serves as a bishop's palace for one of the brothers. There is something about the bride and groom balking at the last minute, but mostly it is a succession of points of view on marriage expressed by caricatures of the church, the army, Mayfair, feminism and other representatives of or revolutionaries against British opinion. Since it is Shaw talking, the observations might be worth hearing in something like a meticulous and carefully stylized production. In this case the dialogue is slurred; played for low comedy; allowed to be hurled almost directly at the audience, and timed with little regard for its subtleties. The play simply does not come through the haphazard treatment.

* * *

Here and there, in the acting, can be found a touch of the right medicine for what ails this revival. John Buckmaster's airy portrayal of a self-confessed snob is a colorful piece of satire. Frederic Warriner is good as a trembling ascetic, and there are traces of a Shavian personality in the benignly reasoning bishop played by Guy Spaull. These characters, fond though they may be of the measured tones of their own voices, come to comic life under the right sort of stage magic, but most of the other actors have not been directed by Peter Frye into such constructive ways. This version of "Getting Married" is not the happiest finale for ANTA's 1950-'51 season, but it is to be hoped that, like a poor dress rehearsal, it will augur them good luck for their reopening next year.

Daily Mirror

May 14, 1951

'Getting Married' Dated, Lacks Sparkle

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The American National Theatre and Academy launched the final play of its 1950-51 season at the ANTA Playhouse last evening. It is George Bernard Shaw's "Getting Married," produced by Marjorie and Sherman Ewing for the W. 52d St. organization.

It is difficult to understand why ANTA and the Ewings really thought "Getting Married" worth doing. Perhaps they worked on the assumption that minor Shaw, inferior Shaw, is better than no Shaw at all. But so much of what it has to say is so dated that this thesis is open to question.

As those of you who caught the Theatre Guild presentation back in 1931 may recall, the comedy is concerned with marriage, polygamy, socialism, snobbery and just about anything else you care to mention. Some of the talk is still good, but most of the ideas are pretty shopworn. And both are cluttered on a somewhat nebulous framework.

ANTA and the Ewings have assembled what, for these times, might be considered an all-star cast. It includes Peggy Wood, John Buckmaster, Margaret Bannerman, Bramwell Fletcher, Dennis Hoey, Edith Neiser, Arthur Treacher, Barbara Britton, John Merivale, Dora Sayers, Frederic Warriner, Guy Spaull and Ronald Telfer.

That is an impressive roster, but under Peter Frye's pedestrian direction these excellent players aren't able to put much sparkle or polish into the Shaw script. There are, however, individual flashes that merit special attention. Fletcher is at his best as the tradesman, Collins. This is a remarkable performance for an actor who usually is seen in drawing-room roles.

Buckmaster, who appeared to fine advantage in "Caesar and Cleopatra," makes as much as possible, under the circumstances, as a contentious gentleman with a Cyrano complex. Miss Wood shines dramatically when she goes into a Freudian dream scene. And Spaull portrays a Bishop with quietly effective assurance.

Despite these occasional moments of histrionic distinction, "Getting Married" doesn't succeed in becoming a satisfactorily entertaining, stimulating or rewarding evening of theatre. It is hardly something to lure even the most ardent of playgoers in from the country on a Sunday night.

The ANTA series has been, in our opinion, mediocre. And that's putting it kindly. It certainly has not been representative of, nor a credit to, an organization calling itself the American National Theatre and Academy. It seems to have been thrown together carelessly, haphazardly, with a minimum of planning.

If such a series is to be repeated next season, ANTA would do well to put a discriminating, tireless and resourceful producer at the head of the project. One who could devote all his time and talent to it. You cannot take the easy way, have divided authority, and obtain distinguished results.

"Dream Girl"

The New York Times

May 10, 1951

Judy Holliday Acts in Rice's 'Dream Girl,' Put On at the City Center

By BROOKS ATKINSON

If Judy Holliday were not good in "Dream Girl," which opened at the City Center last evening, no great harm would be done. For she has the gleam of the true comedienne; this is her year and she can make no mistakes. But the part of the wool-gathering little lady in Elmer Rice's play is a rich one for Miss Holliday, and she has translated it into a funny and thoroughly delightful comic escapade.

Probably Miss Holliday, like Garson Kanin, is tired of hearing about "Born Yesterday" now. It is necessary to point out, however, that Georgina Allerton of "Dream Girl" has some family resemblances to Billie Dawn, the junkman's moll.

She has the same high squeaky voice—and there is none too much of it for the vastness of the City Center. She, too, is in a daze. She has the same uncertain haughtiness when she is confused. She is a tight, trim package with a slightly mocking smile, two fetching dimples and a glossy personality.

* * *

Georgina is several cuts above Billie in culture and education. According to Mr. Rice, she is a daydreamer who is always fleeing reality and taking refuge in gaudy phantasies. If memory serves, there was a kind of mystic romance about her when Betty Field played the part originally.

But she is a comic character now, sometimes teetering over into broad burlesque. And this is all right, too. For Miss Holliday with her moods, her temper and her airy mannerisms is a hilarious actress with an adroit style that is very much her own. As far as that goes, let's not forget that "Dream Girl" is a funny show. Through a long sequence of casual episodes Mr. Rice has satirized a superfluous member of the genteel classes. He has also written some of his most humorous dialogue to get her in and out of her dilemmas. The plot does become a little tiresome before the evening is over. But the shrewdness of the satire, the dryness of the humor and, most of all, the mischief of Miss Holliday's acting make it one of the pleasantest pranks we have had in town this year.

In every respect it is one of the City Center's most refreshing enterprises. Eldon Elder has managed the complicated production agreeably. And Morton Da Costa his directed the performance with a light accent and the aura of a fable.

All the parts are acted with a genial relish. Don DeFore's impudent newspaper man is carried off with real exuberance. Edmon Ryan's droll philanderer, Mary Welch's frank, worldly partner in the bookshop, Ann Shoemaker's petulant mother, William A. Lee's obliging father, Walter Klavun's wavering, attitudinizing brother-in-law compose a first-rate supporting cast.

Everyone has ample opportunity to act in Mr. Rice's crack-brained excursion into the dream-world, and everyone has talent enough to act with heartiness and variety. Especially Miss Holliday: she is in great form—never monotonous or repetitious, always sharp, knowing, light and irresistibly funny. The City Center is in one of its most attractive moods.

"DREAM GIRL"

Comedy by Elmer Rice; staged by Morton Da Costa; scenery by Eldon Elder; original music by William Brooks; costumes by Emeline Roche; executive producer, George Schaefer; revived by Maurice Evans, artistic supervisor, and the New York City Theatre Company at the New York City Center, May 9, 1951. The cast:

Georgina Allerton..Judy Holliday
Lucy Allerton...Ann Shoemaker
Radio Announcer.....
William LeMassena
Dr. J. Gilmore Percival...
William A. Lee
Miriam Allerton Lucas....
Marian Winters
Jim Lucas.....Walter Klavun
Claire Blakeley....Mary Welch
A Stout Woman.....Sylvia Syms
A Doctor.....Donald Symington
Clark Redfield.....Don DeFore
A Policeman...J. English Smith
George Hand.....Edmon Ryan
Luigi.....Arny Freeman
An Usher.....Sarah Marshall
Miss Delehanty..Adrienne Moore
Salarino.....Theodore Tenley
A Chauffer.....Joseph Dooley

Journal American

May 10, 1951

A Disappointing Play And Performance

By ROBERT GARLAND

Six years and Judy Holliday haven't done "Dream Girl" any good. To the contrary. In the revival current on our City Center of Music and Drama, the play and the performance are disappointing. The first is acted off key. The second isn't acted at all. Not by Miss Holliday, whose Georgina Allerton is merely Billie Dawn fed up with it all.

I can't see that Elmer Rice has anything to do with last night's attempt at a resuscitation. It's a crying shame. As it is, Maurice Evans is artistic supervisor, Morton Da Costa is director, Eldon Elder is setting man, Emeline Roche is costume-woman (but not for Miss Holliday) and William Brooks is composer of the music Max Martin directed.

To go on and tell you all the news, George Schaefer, in larger letters than the writer of the play, is executive producer, while Edmon Ryan, Mary Welch, Ann Shoemaker, William Lee and Walter Klavun are featured players. Then surprise, surprise! Don DePore is co-starred with Judy Holliday. Miss Holliday comes first.

And with only one dress. But that's by Pauline Trigere and not to be changed.

* * *

Exhausting Play

"Dream Girl" seems to tire everybody out. Especially the leading ladies. When, in 1945, it was playing here at the Coronet, there was a different Georgina Allerton every time I saw it. First Betty Field, who is related to the author. Then, one after the other, Haila Stoddard, Gaynelle Nixon and Jean Aubuchon.

Each, after her fashion, told how Georgina Allerton is a maiden of daytime imagination, an upper middle-classer who yearns for upper middle-class delights such as Italian restaurants, Mexican hideaways, ladies of the evening and gentlemen of the press. Now, Judy Holliday meets them once again, pretending to be somebody else.

Riding on Mr. Elder's ill-colored imitation scenery, the not-very-erstwhile Billie Dawn isn't happy. Neither as Judy Holliday nor Georgina Allerton. Not being happy, she makes her helpers unhappy, too. Only such old timers as William Lee seem at home. Only such old timers as he know it doesn't matter.

He seems to feel that, unless Georgina Allerton is special, she shouldn't be revived.

* * *

Ryan a Hangover

Taking the featured players as listed, Edmon Ryan is a hangover from "Dream Girl's" original production, along with Mr. Lee: Mary Welch is a hangover from the City Center of Music and Drama's "Little Women"; Ann Shoemaker is a hangover from "Woman Bites Dog," which ran for five performances; Walter Klavun's is his 15th New York role.

They, as well as the non-featured ones, act under Mr. Da Costa's direction. "Dream Girl" is the fourth play he has directed for the City Center of Music and Art, the others being "She Stoops to Conquer," "The Alchemist" and "Captain Brassbound's Conversion." He has acted on Broadway, too: "The Skin of Our Teeth" and "Hamlet."

That's all there is, there isn't any more! Except that I don't believe theatre such as last fortnight's "The Taming of the Shrew," with Claire Luce and Ralph Clanton, and this fortnight's "Dream Girl," with Judy Holliday and Don DeFore, are good because they're cheap. Personally, I'd rather have no New York Theatre Company plays at all.

Where I sat last night at the City Center of Music and Drama, the audience didn't disagree.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

May 10, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY Jr.

Not Born Yesterday

A REVIVAL of Elmer Rice's "Dream Girl," starring Judy Holliday and Don DeFore, flickers like a sputtering arc lamp on the cavernous stage of the New York City Center. The opportunity to see this year's Academy Award-winning actress in a vehicle which is as nearly as possible a solo on the part of the leading lady is not to be dismissed lightly, and it has its rewarding moments. There are times when Miss Holliday brightens an erratic show with the plaintive delivery of a line or an empnatic satirical gesture. But on the whole this is a foggy production, without much verve or vitality, and staged in too vast an area for intimate contact with its comic daydreams.

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Mr. Rice's heroine, who has the most active imagination since Walter Mitty, is a young woman so alive and sensitive to every inflection of existence that reality does not satisfy her. She must project her personality into fictional and highly romantic situations, seeing herself as a murderess in a black cape, a scarlet woman under a lamppost, a sophisticated seductress throwing a rose to Mexican peons, or an amateur actress going on for an ailing star in the role of Portia. The humor depends neither upon gags nor upon the personality of a particular comedienne, but upon the delightful absurdities of a swift-darting fancy in contrast to a quiet, real and human story of an attractive young girl looking for a man. As directed by Morton Da Costa across the overpowering width of the set, this "Dream Girl" has not the style or the pace to sustain this subtle illusion, and no amount of acting, visual jokes or other mechanical substitutes can fill the void.

• • •

There are disconnected portions of the script which give Miss Holliday a chance to put on display her limpid sarcasm, piping anger or grudging self-analysis, and no doubt this makes up to some extent for the absence of a coherent comedy. She is good in the opening soliloquy, in the tart scene and in a telephone conversation with the newspaper man who she professes to hate. Her tentative kind of delivery is not necessarily suited to the overall demands of a heroine who is too supposed to be intellectually vibrant for her own good, but it adds a few amusing character laughs to a show that crawls along anyhow. She is to some extent miscast and to a great extent misdirected here, but she gives "Dream Girl" the Holliday touch with every resource of her own individual kind of performing.

• • •

Don DeFore maintains a wide grin and lounges in attitudes of a sports writer's skepticism as the newspaperman who brings the dream girl down to earth. Edmon Ryan as a wolf trying to establish a working liaison; William A. Lee as the various father symbols in the dreams; Walter Klavun as the hero of these reveries, and Ann Shoemaker as a cynical parent move competently in and out of their multiple roles on the ground or in the heroine's mental clouds. A tricky business under the best of circumstances, this Elmer Rice play does not survive in loose production on an unsuitably large stage. In it one must settle for Judy Holliday—in person and on the stage almost all evening.

Daily Mirror

May 10, 1951

'Dream Girl' Is Off-Beam Without Betty Field

By ROBERT COLEMAN

If ever a play were written for an actress, "Dream Girl" was written for Betty Field. This was brought home to us last evening when Judy Holliday essayed the role of Georgina Allerton in Elmer Rice's expressionistic comedy at the City Center. It just didn't come over as effectively as it did originally.

"Dream Girl," as those of you who saw it in its first manifestation will recall, has to do with a poor little rich girl who refuses to face reality. She insists upon dramatizing herself until a practical, hard-boiled, young newspaperman comes along to jolt her out of her escapist world.

The action wanders between what is and what might be. Rice, one of the early exponents of expressionism in America, has used that technique to encompass his play's changing moods. Expressionism was quite the rage over here in the twenties, as a result of the advent of George Kaiser's "From Morn to Midnight." Then expressionism died out.

Recently, we have been reading a great deal about the subject. We have perused many definitions of it. But, after seeing "Dream Girl," as produced at the City Center last evening, we think we arrived at the crux of it. Expressionism is beer-hall burlesque, by the intelligentsia, sans the beer.

Now, in a smaller theatre, we failed to reach that conclusion. Miss Field played the dreamy, the slightly wacky Georgina with charm, persuasive skill, softness. And Wendell Corey etched a companion piece to match hers, as the book reviewer who would be a sports reporter. A literate one, like John Francis Kieran.

Perhaps, due to the expansive reaches of the City Center, director Morton Da Costa has chosen to broaden the humanity and humor of the Rice script. Miss Holliday, who is very good indeed at portraying dimwits, impersonates Georgina with too obvious strokes, strokes that border on trickery. Don DeFore, who reminds us of an Eddie Foy Jr., who has dined well too often, also works broadly.

Others who make earnest contributions are Ann Shoemaker, William A. Lee, Marjan Winters, Walter Klavun, Mary Welch and Edmon Ryan.

On a limited budget, Eldon Elder and Emeline Roche have provided attractive settings and costumes.

We went for "Dream Girl," when Betty Field and Wendell Corey lent it a measure of theatrical enchantment. But we can only take it with reservations in the less adroit hands of Judy Holliday and Don DeFore. Some of the first-nighters, be it reported, found yaks in the performance that escaped us. As they laughed and applauded, we kept thinking of Field and Corey.

DAILY NEWS

May 10, 1951

Judy Holliday Shifts Character And Plays a Wistful 'Dream Girl'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Judy Holliday, who won stage and film fame as the dumb broad of "Born Yesterday," sought a change of pace last evening by playing the Betty Field role in Elmer Rice's 1945 comedy, "Dream Girl," at the City Center. It was a success for Miss Holliday, Mr. Rice . . . and Miss Field. Judy is attractive and funny and she has an instinct for timing her comedy punch lines, but she cannot quite manage the very feminine, very gentle goofiness which made Miss Field so charming in the original production of an ingenious little play.

Well, anyhow, Miss Holliday gets away from playing that hard-voiced tomato, Billie Dawn. Now she is a wistful dreamer who spices up her nice ordinary life by imagining she is somewhere else doing something else. The Holliday fans, who used to be us few old stage addicts, have increased vastly in number since Judy won a screen Oscar. They assembled last evening to the full capacity of the City Center and we all enjoyed Miss Holliday very much.

A Stiff Workout.

But we darn near lost the play—or at least I did. "Dream Girl" has more scenes than a Rockefeller Center postcard album, but it is a small play nevertheless—an intimate at the City Center, which is the Soldier Field of the drama, and putting "Dream Girl" across is quite a triumph. Miss Holliday must have had to run like a jackrabbit to make some of her scene and costume changes, but she always

turned up cool, coiffed and collected.

The only one who got winded last night was, surprisingly, the author. Some of Mr. Rice's scenes, which had seemed swift and sharp five years ago, now looked as though they needed trimming. Maybe this was an optical illusion due to the size of the house.

Good Company and Sets.

Miss Holliday has a pleasant bunch of playmates, including Don DeFore as her hardboiled journalistic suitor, Ann Shoemaker as her fast-cracking mother, William A. Lee as her obsequious father, Mary Welch as her very attractive partner in the bookselling business and Walter Klavun and Edmond Ryan as a couple of admirers.

Eldon Elder, the scene designer, has done a rather remarkable job of providing quick changes on a big stage, and I particularly admire his courtroom setting. Morton Da Costa has directed the company in reasonable keeping with the spirit of Mr. Rice's original staging.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

May 10, 1951

Judy Holliday Proves Some 'Dream Girl'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Most people who go to the City Center's revival of "Dream Girl" will be primarily curious as to whether Judy Holliday is doing a copy of her wonderful performance in "Born Yesterday," which to date has pretty much comprised her whole familiar career.

The news is that her performance is quite remarkably different. From the point of view of craftsmanship it may even be better, since the role is more demanding and varied.

Darkens Hair.

Her tremulous tone is in evidence, of course. On the other hand she has aided the fresh illusion by darkening her hair. But Miss Holliday is one of those rare actresses who produce the surface of a person, speaking and acting, and tell you clearly at the same time of the person beneath all that.

Her Georgina here is different inside and out from her famous junkman's darling. The "Dream Girl" heroine is a heroically long part. You will remember that she is an imaginative girl who constantly dozes off into fantastic situations of her own creation. She is never off the stage, and she is rarely in the same state of mind for more than a few minutes.

Naturally this role has challenged many actresses. None since Betty Field, who created the part, has had anything like the success with it Judy Holliday now has.

The flashiest experiences of the Dream Girl are those when she imagines herself a streetwalker and a great actress. Miss Holliday's version of the streetwalker sequence is most remarkable for the way it makes fun of an innocent girl's dime novel adaptation of a wicked woman.

Though the play has plenty of laughs, it is basically tender rather than bright, and humorous rather than witty. It runs pretty long. Since its gentle pace seems entirely appropriate, some cutting would benefit it.

Mechanics Difficult.

The mechanical presentation of the work is extremely difficult, and has been solved neatly enough in literal terms. Like so much of the theater nowadays, and nearly all television, this production tends to superfluous physical setting.

To have prepared this play so smoothly in so short a time is quite remarkable. Judy Holliday has a grip on her part and the play that could hardly be improved upon.

DeFore Co-stars.

Don DeFore, of pictures, is costarred as the talkative journalist who wins the girl, and he is a fresh, easy-going personality excellently suited for the part.

Edmon Ryan is a standout as the menace he played in the original Broadway run of the show, and Mary Welch is an agreeable business partner of the dream girl.

New York Post

May 10, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

Revival of Mr. Rice's 'Dream Girl'

Elmer Rice's "Dream Girl" never was one of my favorite comedies, but my recollection is that, when it was first done here in 1945, it seemed considerably more fun than it did in its revival at the City Center last night. The story of the moody young woman whose romantic imagination was always fleeing from reality still has some bright and amusing scenes, but today, lacking the deftness in acting and the mechanical dexterity in production that marked its original presentation, it is heavy and laborious going for a great deal of the time.

Although Judy Holliday, in the exacting title role, cannot bring to the part the sparkle and variety that made Betty Field's performance so notable, I think that Miss Holliday's playing is decidedly one of the more pleasant features of the current "Dream Girl." There is a wonderfully endearing quality of guileless sweetness mixed with her instinctive feeling for humor that always makes it particular fun to watch her and gives her portrayals freshness and warmth. She is not at her best in Mr. Rice's play, but she is immensely likeable.

As I recall it, an actor, now in the movies, named Wendell Corey gave a delightful performance in the first production as the newspaper book-reviewer who teaches the heroine the value of accepting reality. Somehow, he made the rather brash fellow humorous and engaging, as well as crisply sardonic. There might be no particular point in bringing up his portrayal in a review of the current revival, save that you would never know that the dashing reviewer was a pleasant and entertaining young man from the way Don DeFore now acts him. In Mr. DeFore's hands, he seems something of a smug and pedantic bore.

Somehow it appears to be impossible to talk about the revival at the City Center without going back to the first production. For example, the best performance last night was given by an underrated actor named Edmon Ryan, as a wolfish gentleman bent on persuading the heroine to go to Mexico with him. And Mr. Ryan acted the same part in 1945. Indeed, although I'm afraid it comes under the head of that contradiction in terms known as "constructive criticism," it strikes me that it would have been a good idea if he now played the newspaperman. I also liked Mary Welch in a small role.

Being Academic

Since the chances are that a large proportion of the audience that will see the revival of "Dream Girl" didn't happen to attend the original presentation, it may sound a trifle academic to go into a discussion here of the earlier production. But I believe there is good reason for doing so. For Mr. Rice's comedy seemed quite a bit of fun in those days, and the hilarity was but intermittent last night. Something has gone a little wrong somewhere, and I doubt if it is entirely due to Mr. Rice or to excessive praise once accorded his play.

I think it is probably true that the reviewers in 1945 overrated "Dream Girl" a little. But it did have the material of a good comedy vehicle, with considerable brightness and imagination in it. Now it seems strangely plodding and laborious. For one thing, it demands a smoothness in its stage mechanics that the City Center cannot supply. As a result, it takes far longer to pass a given point than is good for the maintainance of a spirit of gayety. I always enjoy seeing Judy Holliday, but "Dream Girl" is no longer very entertaining.

"Stalag 17"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

May 9, 1951

'Stalag 17' Hits Top As Gripping Drama

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Type—Comedy melodrama
Topic—Spies
I find it—Thrilling

To get right down to specific cases, the windup of "Stalag 17" is unquestionably the most all-out excitement in the current theater.

The suspense grows close to unbearable as this neat melodrama nears its conclusion. It is designed for the purest kind of vicarious thrills. It tries to prove nothing, and it asks only easy attention.

If it occurs to you that the setting of a prison camp during the war may be depressing, forget all such notions. The authors know from first-hand experience what they are talking about and have presented here the most hilarious aspects of such a life. The humor is wry, but it is rough and wild and persuasive, too.

Variations on Suspense.

The plot centers around the presence of an informer among some American fliers held in a German camp. One man is openly accused, but several more are quite possible suspects.

The play is smart in using all possible variations on the formula for suspense. At first you are perplexed as to just who the guilty party is. Before that question exhausts your interest, you are told. Then you concentrate on how long it will take the other men to find out.

Before long, one of them does. For good enough reasons he keeps his mouth shut, in the face of imminent disaster. So the last stanza finds you on the edge of your seat rooting for him to tell all before it is too late.

Life in the Balance.

He finally does, with tremendously dramatic effect, and the play resolves itself in a fanfare of excitement.

The identity of the spy is of growing importance to the men, since every aspect of their life is reported to their guards, and finally the life of one of them hangs on secrecy.

The play is told in terms of pure adventure. The men are hardly more than general types, who pretty much round out what could be an average group under any circumstances. Very pleasantly, there is no delving into psychological causes for anybody being what he is.

Expert Staging.

The play is beautifully staged by its producer Jose Ferrer, so that every ounce of its excitement and compelling bewilderment comes to the surface. It has intentional variety of mood and pace that lets a dark and quiet stage be packed with tension.

This is not in any sense a vehicle for actors. Generally speaking, the less conspicuous they are, the better they are. I particularly liked Harvey Lembeck, and thought John Ericson managed a difficult role with real honesty. Other major roles are played by Robert Strauss as a company clown, Laurence Hugo as a security officer, and Frank Maxwell as the camp leader.

Lothar Rewalt impresses as a guard, and Ludwig Roth touches his brief appearance as a Geneva Conference inspector with extraordinary reality.

The title refers to one in a series of prison camps.

"STALAG 17"

Comedy-melodrama by Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski; staged by Jose Ferrer; settings by John Robert Lloyd; costumes by Noel Taylor; presented by Mr. Ferrer, in association with Richard Condon, at the 48th Street Theatre, May 8, 1951. The cast:

S. S. Guard.....Curt Lowens
Stosh.....Robert Strauss
Harry Shapiro..Harvey Lembeck
Price.....Laurence Hugo
Herb Gordon....Robert Shawley
Hoffman.....Frank Maxwell
Sefton.....John Ericson
Duke.....Arthur Walsh
McCarthy...Douglas Henderson
Horney.....Frank Campanella
Marko.....William Pierson
Corporal Shultz..Lothar Rewalt
Dunbar.....Mark Roberts
Reed.....Allan Melvin
Peterson.....Jess Cain
Red-dog.....Garry Davis
Witherspoon....Richard Poston
McKay.....Eric Fleming
German Captain...Otto Simanek
Geneva Man.....Ludwig Roth
Second Guard....Edwin Strome

New York Post

May 9, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

Good Drama About a Prison Camp

One of the admirable things about "Stalag 17," the play dealing with American war prisoners in a German prison camp, which opened at the 48th Street Theater yesterday afternoon, is that there is no pretense about it. Its authors, Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski, who are writing from personal experience, haven't bothered with any deep or tragic psychological probing into the hearts and minds of men in war, but have confined themselves to telling a good, melodramatic story about an escape and a secret traitor in the camp, and a forthright, exciting melodrama they make of it, too.

I repeat that you mustn't expect a work of any profound distinction, or remarkable insight, or the sort of writing brilliance that made Harry Brown's unappreciated "A Sound of Hunting" so notable a play. Although its atmosphere is persuasive and its characterization vigorous, "Stalag 17" is content to be what its authors call it, "a comedy melodrama," and, for what it sets out to do, it is, I think, strikingly successful. It is tense and constantly interesting, it captures an emotional appeal that an audience should find pretty irresistible, and it is altogether one of the best shows of the season.

The Traitor

As an experienced addict of mystery stories, I suppose I should have discovered the identity of the man who is exposing the secrets of his fellow prisoners to the German jailers considerably before the dramatists get around to revealing it. But, as a matter of fact, it isn't important whether you find out early in the play which soldier is the culprit or not, particularly since no effort is made to keep it from you for long. What is important is that the breaking down of the traitor's defenses by the most unpopular of the prisoners and the escape of the American about to be punished by Storm Troopers are so effectively managed.

Among the virtues of "Stalag 17" is the fact that it is the kind of melodrama that American actors can play so realistically and with such compelling vigor. Jose Ferrer, who is also its producer, has staged it with admirable skill, and the all-male cast acts it for all the tingling suspense that is in it. Excitement is still an agreeable quality to find in the theater, and the new war play has it in abundance. I believed every character, from the youngest and callowest of the prisoners to the fraudulently friendly German guard and the representative of the Swiss Red Cross, and such plausibility helps enormously.

Credibility

Captious criticism could point out that "Stalag 17" misses few tricks in leaning on the familiar comedy material of horseplay and the emotional interest of unashamed melodrama. It happens, however, that thanks to the believable acting, Mr. Ferrer's realistic direction, and the general, all-around effectiveness of the story-telling, both the comedy and the melodrama take on the necessary quality of credibility. There is no denying that war is fairly melodramatic activity, and there is no reason why dramatists shouldn't take advantage of that fact. The authors of the new play take advantage of it fairly and effectively.

Since all of the performances are in the right vein, it is a little difficult to choose between them. But there should be a special word for a new actor named John Ericson, who not only plays the sullen prisoner suspected by his companions with forceful skill but indicates that he is a young man who should be heard from in the theater. There is a likewise noticeably fine work by Robert Strauss, Harvey Lambeck, Laurence Hugo, Frank Maxwell and Robert Shawley, and I am sorry to omit the others. "Stalag 17" is what it intends to be, a melodrama that is steadily interesting and always alive.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

May 9, 1951

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY JR.

Lively and Interesting

A STORY of American soldiers in a German prison camp seethes with a mixture of comedy and melodrama in "Stalag 17" at the Forty-eighth Street Theater. This new script by Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski presents a group of wise-cracking prisoners whiling away the months with latrine jokes and brought up sharply from time to time by the evidence that a spy has been planted among them. Jose Ferrer's direction spares no emphasis on sight gags or cat-and-mouse play, and the actors nearly raise the roof with the G. I. roles. "Stalag 17" is almost as facile as a routine motion picture and it touches no great heights of drama, but it is a lively and theatrical show.

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The authors spent two years in a prison camp during World War II, and their observations resemble those of other recent war stories. There are poor living conditions here, and a real tension between captives and captors, but the surface is covered over with a good-humored acceptance of and adaptation to a bad situation. A few nerves are rubbed raw by the confinement, but most of the kidding is in low comedy fun, with the accent on bodily comforts and individual peculiarities. These characters are brave, brash and ingenious, and their dialogue is salty and slangy. The implied danger always lurks underneath, however, and the serious theme enters smoothly into the comic pattern when there is a traitor to be dealt with, an escape to be planned or a licking to be taken.

Robert Strauss leads the humor with his acting of a lumbering slob who is the official gripe artist of the barracks. He plays the part as though there were no bones in his large body, and he is funnier than one might believe possible with material that is almost stubbornly earthy. On the dramatic side there is John Ericson as a resentful and sneering young man exchanging hate with everybody. He is fine as the trouble-maker who, for all his resentment, is the only one of the group cunning enough to discover the spy. The others are somewhere in between these two, from William Pierson as a nasal and officious message-bearer to Allan Melvin as a worried saboteur who does accurate imitations of famous movie stars. None of these personalities go very deep, but the acting is boisterous or pointed enough to help carry them through a carefully planned set of contrasting incidents.

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The guards of "Stalag 17" are represented by stiff uniformed figures, bursts of German dialogue and the role of a Nazi corporal, played by Lothar Rewalt, whose proffered friendliness is transparent as glass. Harvey Lembeck, Laurence Hugo, Robert Shawley, Frank Maxwell, Ludwig Roth and internationalist Garry Davis are among the various men circulating in this suitably barren setting by John Robert Lloyd. From a raw kid to a young scion of a proud Boston family, they are all types, and Ferrer stirs them up in their pranks and schemes as though preventing them from standing still long enough to be observed closely. He has, at least, turned on a steady flow of action, menace and sarcastic quips which captures the attention over the length of his play. "Stalag 17" is a boisterous thriller which keeps moving along its narrow course, and it is enjoyable as such.

The New York Times

May 9, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

"Stalag 17" sounds grim, and so is the headlong play of that title which opened at the Forty-eighth Street yesterday afternoon. The title refers to a German war prison-camp where the authors, Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski, spent two captive years. In recognition of the rowdy humor that ambles through it, they describe it as a "comedy melodrama"; and the clowning and wise-cracking deserve that billing.

But the authors are basically interested in the tension and excitement of a frightening situation. There is a German agent planted in the barracks where a number of American war prisoners are gloomily waiting for the end of the war.

* * *

For the most part, they are a congenial handful of ingenious Americans, and they are trying to escape or irritate their captors generally. In some mysterious way, all their plans reach the ears of the German guards almost instantly. Private conversations become the property of the enemy at once.

This leak in security becomes particularly dangerous when one of the new prisoners boasts that he has just sabotaged a German train. Imagining that he is among friends he boasts of his achievement, but the German commandant picks him up with the whole story swiftly. Detecting the secret German agent who is living as an American in the midst of Americans is the main business of the play.

* * *

In both the writing and the acting the search for the traitor is a taut and harrowing business. For José Ferrer has staged "Stalag 17" with theatrical expertness. If you want to be supercilious about it, you may think that the traitor might be identified before he does so much damage if the other characters were as keen as a Gotham theatregoer. And you may also suspect the authors of using humor for padding. There are times when their horseplay in the American vernacular very nearly shoves their melodrama off the stage.

But this is counsel of perfection from one theatregoer who is still shaking from the excitement of the performance. John Robert Lloyd has filled the stage with the dramatically lighted interior of a squalid bunkhouse. Inside this utilitarian shambles some racy and picturesque actors put on a flaring show.

* * *

Robert Strauss is hilarious as the chief clown of the barracks, and Harvey Lembeck is scarcely less funny as his buddy. John Ericson gives an honest and vivid performance as the man hated most by all his associates. Frank Maxwell as the captain of the barracks, Laurence Hugo as the sanctimonious security officer, Lothar Rewalt as a fatuous German guard, Otto Simanek as a brutish German captain, Ludwig Roth as an amiable Geneva representative, and Mark Roberts and Allan Melvin as Air Force prisoners—give admirable performances that never stray from the main point.

"Stalag 17" is a stinging melodrama about something of crucial importance to the characters caught in it. Mr. Bevan and Mr. Trzcinski have made a turbulent and gusty play out of a haunting experience.

Journal American

May 9, 1951

Funny and Tragic, Well Staged, Acted

By ROBERT GARLAND

Although programs at the Forty-eighth Street call "Stalag 17" a comedy-melodrama, it is more a farce-tragedy. Not only is it funny, it is tragic. Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski have written it out of their own young lives. And Jose Ferrer, who loves the theatre as it should be loved, has staged it.

Although I saw "Stalag 17" one Sunday night in the March of this year, when it was given by the Junior Lambs, I had heard of it before. So had Mr. Ferrer. He, too, went to see it. He, too, found it to his liking. That's why he has brought it onto Broadway, with a stout heart and a mercenary mind.

The playwrights could ask for no truer direction. This, too, Mr. Ferrer has provided. The scenery by John Robert Lloyd is as it should be. So is Mr. Lloyd's lighting. Noel Taylor's costumes belong. Even the acting could hardly be improved upon. Men are more direct when women do not interfere.

Even though it arrived a little late for prize-giving, here is another play worthy of some consideration.

* * *

All-Male Cast

The title, "Stalag 17," refers to the internment camp in which the farce-tragedy occurs. The action takes place in a barracks somewhere in Germany. The time is during World War II. This dates the piece, which could be good. Who could enjoy its farce and tragedy in face of the happenings in Korea?

Making use of an all-male cast—there isn't even an Ann Girard—the stage Americans, shot down by the stage Nazis, do the best they can. Most of it is small. Some of it is not. All of it adds up to comedy, plus tragedy, plus trivia. No little of the trivia is illuminating, if you can hear between the lines.

Even so, "Stalag 17" shows character. It stems from the observations of Mr. Bevan and Mr. Trzcinski. They, seven years ago, had little to do but sit and look and listen. How well they did makes the farce-tragedy ring true. It even molds the melodrama, when it is there . . .

But Jose Ferrer has directed so affectionately that the melodrama is not as melodramatic